

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 7312

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: ASAMGARH BY-ELECTION: INDIRA'S CONGRESS SCORES ITS
FIRST WIN IN THE NORTH

REF: NEW DELHI 7158

1. MRS. GANDHI'S CONGRESS (I) SCORED ITS FIRST WIN
IN THE NORTHERN "HINDI HEARTLAND" ON MAY 7 WHEN ITS
CANDIDATE, MRS. MOSHINA KIDWAI, CAPTURED THE AZAMGARH
(UP) BY-ELECTION TO THE LOK SABHA. THE VICTORY WAS
A CONVINCING ONE SINCE MRS. KIDWAI DEFEATED THE JANATA
CANDIDATE, RAM BACHAN YADAV, BY OVER 35,000 VOTES. THE
CANDIDATE OF THE OFFICIAL CONGRESS, CHANDRAJIT YADAV,
CAME IN A VERY DISTANT THIRD. AT THE SAME TIME, CONGRESS (I)
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ALSO WON THE BY-ELECTIONS HELD TO FILL TWO VACANT
SEATS IN THE UP STATE ASSEMBLY. IN BOTH OF THESE
CONTESTS THE JANATA CANDIDATES WERE DEFEATED BY
CONSIDERABLE MARGINS. ONE OF THESE ASSEMBLY SEATS
HAD BEEN WON BY THE UNDIVIDED CONGRESS IN THE JUNE 1977
ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND THE OTHER HAD BEEN CAPTURED BY
THE JANATA.

2. MRS. KIDWAI'S VICTORY IN AZAMGARH COMES AS NO MAJOR SURPRISE. MRS. GANDHI'S PARTY HAD ALREADY PERFORMED CREDIBLY IN THE KARNAL LOK SABHA BY-ELECTION IN HARYANA IN EARLY APRIL, LOSING TO THE JANATA BY A MERE 18,000 VOTES. NOW SHE HAS DEMONSTRATED EVEN MORE CONVINCINGLY THAT CONGRESS (I) IS A MAJOR CHALLENGER TO JANATA IN THE "HINDI HEARTLAND", AND THAT SHE HAS HERSELF REGAINED MUCH OF HER OLD FOLLOWING IN THIS AREA WHICH HAD TURNED ITS BACK ON HER ONLY A LITTLE MORE THAN A YEAR AGO. THE FACT THAT MRS. GANDHI CAMPAIGNED LONG AND HARD WILL ADD TO THE PERSONAL FLAVOR OF HER VICTORY THERE.

3. THE DISASTROUS SHOWING BY THE OFFICIAL CONGRESS CANDIDATE IS CERTAIN TO FURTHER DEMORALIZE THAT ALREADY BADLY MAULED PARTY AND IS LIKELY TO QUICKEN THE TEMPO OF DEFECTIONS TO THE CONGRESS (I) CAMP. MRS. GANDHI HAS ONCE AGAIN DEMONSTRATED THAT IN THE POPULAR MIND HERS IN THE "REAL" CONGRESS.

4. THE MOST LIKELY IMMEDIATE RESULT OF THE JANATA DEFEAT MAY BE THE REMOVAL OF RAM NARESH YADAV AS CHIEF MINISTER OF UP. YADAV HAD WON THE AZAMGARH SEAT IN 1977, AND THE ELECTORATE'S REJECTION OF THE JANATA CANDIDATE (WHO WAS A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF THE CHIEF MINISTER) PROBABLY HAS NOW SEALED HIS FATE. THE
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INCOMPETENT YADAV IN ANY EVENT HAS BECOME THE OBJECT OF INTENSE CREITICISM WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY, AND HIS EXIT HAS LONG BEEN IN THE WORKS. THE EFFECT OF AZAMGARH UPON THE POWER BALANCE AMONG THE NATIONAL JANATA LEADERS IS MORE DIFFICULT TO GAUGE AT THIS POINT. IF PAST EXPERIENCE

IS ANY GUIDE, THE DEFEAT WILL LEAD TO A CROSSFIRE OF CRITICISM, EACH FACTIONAL LEADER BLAMING THE OTHERS FOR THE SETBACK. A MORE SENSIBLE REACTION, TO CLOSE RANKS BEFORE THE GROWING CHALLENGE OF MRS. GANDHI, WOULD COME AS A SURPRISE TO MOST OBSERVERS HERE.

5. AS NOTED IN REFTTEL, THE AZAMGARH CAMPAING WAS MARKED BY INTENSE APPEALS ALONG CASTE LINES. WE HAVE NOT SEEN THE BREAKDOWN OF VOTING IN THE BY-ELECTION, BUT IT IS OF COURSE EVEIDENT THAT THE JANATA'S EFFORT TO FORM A WINNING COMBINATION AMONG THE SO-CALLED BACKWARD CASTES FAILED IN THIS INSTANCE. MRS. GANDHI, ON THE OTHER HAND, APPARENTLY SUCCEEDED IN RECONSTRUCTING THE TRADITIONAL COALITION OF BRAHMINS, HARIJANS AND MUSLIMS AS THE CORNERSTONE FOR ELECTORAL SUCCESS. HER CANDIDATE ALSO PROBABLY PICKED UP SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT AMONG OTHER GROUPS. IN

ADDITION, NEWS REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE TURNOUT
OF WOMEN VOTERS WAS HIGH, AND THIS MAY HAVE ALSO
BEEN A FACTOR IN THE VICTORY. MRS. GANDHI WILL
DOUBTLESS SEE THIS COMBINATION AS A FORMULA FOR
FURTHER SUCCESS AS SHE MOVES ALONG THE COMEBACK
TRAIL.
GOHEEN

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